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QUINTESSENCE OF GITANJALI

BY
C. C. CHATTERJI

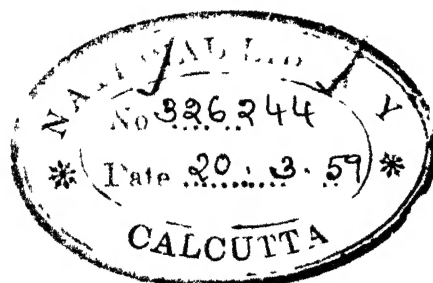
FOREWORD BY
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From the words of the poet men take what
meanings please them; yet their last meaning
points to thee—

Gitanjali.

FOREWORD

I read somewhere this observation from an Arabian poet that sometimes the pearls in a chaplet are unstrung only to arrange them in a more beautiful way. In going through Professor C. C. Chatterji's study the *Quintessence of Gitanjali*, a little work which I have read with pleasure and profit, I was frequently reminded of the above sentiment from the Arabic. The English *Gitanjali* (published for the first time in 1911) is a selection of poems which were composed in

Bengali at different times some years earlier by Rabindranath Tagore and were published in three separate books. We are accustomed to think that this selection was made at random by the poet, and that the poems in it are but detached gems put in the frame-work of a single volume no doubt, but lacking in any inherent objective or purpose, any order, conscious or unconscious. We never gave a thought to it, as a matter of fact. But Professor Chatterji has read the English *Gitanjali* with loving care, and he is also familiar with the Bengali poems in the original. And it has struck him that there is actually a plan or development in the poems in their resetting in English. Quite unexpectedly, a purpose shines out in the arrangement of the poems. Professor Chatterji has sought to unfold this plan or purpose in the ten sections of his paper.

One does not know if Rabindranath himself selected his poems for the English *Gitanjali* with a set purpose of aim in view. It is more likely that he did not do so. Nevertheless, it is Professor Chatterji's finding that we can see in it the unfoldment of a spiritual experience and the final attainment of a spiritual goal—a sort of *Pilgrim's Progress* for the poet's spirit. The poems, as Professor

Chatterji has beautifully shown, can be resolved into a reasonable series or sequence of ideas and experiences. What these are I need not venture to summarise; but they are noticeable in their harmonious progression or continuity clearly enough, as every reader of Professor Chatterji's book will find out. Was Rabindranath here the instrument of an unseen force (as his genius as a super-earthly thing is a spark from the glory of the God-head, as the *Gita* has put it) in presenting a sort of handbook for aspirants in the path of God through these poems?

Professor Chatterji is apparently well-read in orthodox Hindu philosophy—in the *Vedanta*, and he has deeply imbibed its spirit. Naturally enough, he seeks to interpret many of the moods and visions of the poet in terms of the *Vedanta*. Similarly it would be quite easy and natural to correlate Rabindranath's poems with medieval *Vaishnava* poetry and experience; and many (including Professor Chatterji, in part) have sought to do it. But it is doubtful if Rabindranath himself would accept the position that his poems and his experiences which form their basis are illustrations of a scriptural or formulated *Vedanta* or *Vaishnava* cult. In fact, he has points of contact with all that is found

in the higher intellectual and mystical planes; but he remains himself—simple and subtle, childlike and profound both together, and baffling all categorical affiliation.

In these days of insane hurry and maddening bustle, man is losing his balance and his interest in quiet meditation as he finds less and less time for serious and thoughtful study. Our best writers today are full of “pep”, they only are piquant and they spur our jaded sentiments with the violent appeal of things which are loud but ephemeral. They seldom help us to dive into our inner being, to discover ourselves, to cultivate the music that is within us and make it in tune with the Infinite. It is refreshing to find occasionally a quiet scholar like Professor C. C. Chatterji, now living in retirement after a long and honoured career of service in training the young men of his country in one of our biggest colleges, who in a still, small voice tells us of the quest for things that endure, the Ultimate Reality that is behind life, taking his inspiration from a great little book, the *Gitanjali* which reflects in a convincing way the hidden pathway trod by the human soul to find its harmony and its fulfilment that are in God.

The University, Calcutta,
November 26, 1949.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji.

INTRODUCTION

The English *Gitanjali*, as its name would seem to imply, does not contain the translation of all the poems of the Bengali *Gitanjali*. It comprises some poem of *Gitanjali*, but more from *Naivedya*, *Kheya* and *Gitimalya*. It is also to be borne in mind that the English poems are not *literal* translations of the Bengali ones; but they are *free* translations, giving the sense and substance of the Bengali poems, sometimes combining two of them in one.

But the English *Gitanjali* is an organic whole.

One single vein of thought runs through all the poems, linking them in natural piety. Though drawn from different sources, the poems have not been thrown in promiscuously. They have been arranged and disposed in a regular order, which indicates the development of the poet's thought as he passes from stage to stage in his spiritual life, and marks the changes that come upon his spiritual moods as he gains or loses contact with the Infinite. For the poems of *Gitanjali*, says Sir Radhakrishnan, are the offerings of the finite to the Infinite.

It is possible to find in them landmarks of thought, which divide them into groups, circumscribed by a border line. Not that they may be enclosed in water-tight compartments, as very often they overlap and coalesce; but read in the spirit of devotion and worship, in which the psalmist offers his hymns, they reveal to us how he progressively moves towards the fulfilment of the divine purpose for which he is created.

I

From this point of view the first poem is of great importance and significance. It tells us of the beginning of the poet's life. It sets us in tune with the singer; allows us an insight into the joy he feels at his creation; and prepares us for 'melodies eternally new' and 'utterance ineffable'. It also reveals the poet's belief in the doctrine of re-incarnation. He says, "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with

fresh life". He knows he has to pass through many cycles of births and deaths before he can attain the ideal of life—the ideal of a poet, a musician. So that when his maker calls upon him to sing, his heart breaks with pride, his soul bursts out in an ecstasy of harmony, and his songs touch His feet in adoration (No. 2). He sings and he tries to sing in imitation of his divine master, whose note of music is present in all forms of His manifestations. He perceives it variously thus—"The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on " (No. 3). Now, having found the purpose of God in his life, he prepares himself to fulfil it by the consecration of his body, mind and soul. So he sings:—"Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart"
.... (No. 4).

Self-purification so sublime brings him grace. He considers himself made worthy of acceptance and he approaches God, declaring, "Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure". For without Him, his life is a burden. And with Him face to face comes the humbling thought that he is no better than a little flower, maybe without smell or colour, yet a flower meant to be an offering at the feet of God. Hence his only prayer is—"Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not. Use this flower in thy service and pluck it while there is time" (No. 6). His song is, therefore, the simple song of a dedicated flower, which comes out straight from the heart and has no adornments—wordly decorations—as they prevent contact with God. He asks his master,—“Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music” (No. 7).

Dedicated though it is to the service of God, his is not the life of an ascetic who keeps away from all the activities of the world. A life, shut off from the healthful dust of the earth and robbed of the right of entrance to the great fair of common human life, is to him a perverted one. The child decked by his mother with a prince's robes, who

keeps himself from the world lest they should be stained with dust is the symbol of a poor recluse. (No. 8). The right aim of a man's life is to be true to the kindred points of earth and heaven. Only he should have no desire of his own, for "thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath. It is unholy—take not thy gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is offered by sacred love". Thus free from desire and full of good-will, a man can serve both God and His creatures. The service of God should not preclude one from the service of man, even the poorest, and lowliest, and lost. The footstool of God is where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost. The poet repeats with emphasis, "He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower and his garment is covered with dust"; and so his final appeal is, "Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow" (No. 11). Herein lies Tagore's philosophy of life; herein is described his attitude towards God, man and religion. Neither detachment nor retirement from the world is the

injunction of religion to him. It does not inculcate that the sensuous world is all Maya, and that the path of spiritual attainment is renunciation. Tagore has himself said as much in many poems; for instance in No. 73, he writes, "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. . . . No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delight of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight. Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love". This is the only path of life which leads to God, though the way is long and the time taken to cover the distance is long. But "it is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune". In this manner passing through varied experiences, not only of this life but many more,—pursuing his voyage through the wildernesses of worlds leaving his track on many a star and plane—having strayed far and wide, the poet finds the Kingdom of God within him and hears the voice of His presence, immanent in all things, "I am" (No. 12).

II

Now begins another stage in the life of the poet. Though he is always aware of the mission of his life; though he sings 'dedication of life' to his God, still he finds that he is not yet wholly prepared to meet Him. He says, "The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day....The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set; only there is the agony of wishing in my heart. The blossom has not opened; only the wind is sighing by.....I live in the hope of meeting with him;

but this meeting is not yet" (No. 13). He still nourishes many desires in his heart, which lure him away from his true goal. But God, out of His mercy, withholds the fulfilment of these vain desires. The poet also sees the kindness of God in His cruelty, and expresses his thankfulness saying, "Day by day thou art making me worthy of thy full acceptance by refusing me ever and anon, saving me from perils of weak, uncertain desire". He knows that his only business is to sing songs in the presence of God; and now he is waiting for the hour when God will command him to stand before Him to sing. He has been invited to this world's festival and his part is to play upon his instrument. He has done all he could, and now he wants to know if the time has come at last when he may see His face and offer his silent salutation. Even if it has not, he will wait for love to give himself up into His hands. In the world's market, where brisk trade is going on for the busy, he evades those who come with their laws and their codes to bind him fast (17). In the rainy days when he is all alone, his yearning to meet his God is keen; he keeps watch waiting for Him outside at the door. But he has the patience to endure the silence of God, and wait like the night with starry vigil, for he is confident

that 'the morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky' (No. 19). Then, one day, unknown to him, his heart blossomed into flower at the divine touch, giving out sweet fragrance. There is a vague feeling in him that his patient waiting to see his God, through many changes in the face of his spiritual sky, has brought him near his goal. He says, "I knew not that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart" (No. 20). Thus he waits and waits, till he fears that perhaps the golden moment has come and gone. He, therefore, exclaims in despair, "The spring has done it flowering and taken leave. And now with the burden of faded futile flowers I wait and linger". And yet there is a hint in earth and sky that his waiting will not go in vain. He feels a thrill passing through the air with the notes of the far away song floating from the other shore (No. 21). Accordingly, he prays that if He comes, —his only friend, his best beloved-like a solitary wayfarer on a rainy day, He should not pass by his gates which are always kept open to welcome Him (No. 22). And prayer restores his hopefulness: He is coming to meet him. In a series of five poems

(No. 23-27), in which night and night scenes are described, he mentions the changes in his moods as he waits for God's appearance in anxious vigil, in trustful sleep, in idle dreaminess, or kindling the lamp of love to meet Him. Sometimes he cannot sleep; the night is stormy, the lover is abroad on his journey of love to meet him, and now and again he looks out on the darkness to see if he is there. Or, he falls asleep and the lover appears, making his dreams resonant with his melodies, but he does not wake and misses his sight. So he thinks he is unfortunate; but misery brings the news that his Lord calls him to the love—tryst through the darkness of the night. Through suffering comes salvation.

III

Naturally the question arises in the poet's mind—what is the obstacle in the way of seeing my God face to face! He has dedicated himself to Him; he has been waiting for Him with flower and incense to offer his worship; he feels He is so near, and yet He is so far. Why? What impediments have been thrown between his yearning soul and her attainment of the divine? In the next series of six poems (Nos. 28-33), he mentions the hindrances one by one, when he realises how each one

impedes his progress as he moves towards his *Jivan-devata*, the Lord of his life. The first to be mentioned is material possession. Wealth is a great obstruction. It is possible for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, but it is not possible for a wealthy to enter the kingdom of Heaven. He knows it, but he cannot part with the goods of the earth; he holds them with the grip of avarice. He dare not even pray to God to take them away from him, lest his prayer should be granted. The walls of riches grow around him and imprison the self within, so that he loses sight of his true being.

Besides these possessions, another factor which waylays him is his egotism. It retards his advance towards spiritual realisation. But he cannot avoid it. It has become a part of his self—it is his 'little self'. So that with wealth and power, arrogating to himself even what he ought to have offered to his God, he has forged a chain which holds him fast. All his interest is now centred in the treasure-house where he has amassed the riches of the earth, and all his love is bound by ties of this world. Earthly attachments break into his sacred shrine and snatch with unholy hands the offerings from God's altar. He is so far gone in worldliness that he forgets even to invoke his God in his

prayers. That God's love yet waits for him is his only hope. "If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart, thy love for me still waits for my love."



IV

Struggling against these external and internal forces which had all but crushed his spirit, rending the veil of self which had almost shut up in a mental gloom, he once more comes out in the light. He prays. He lifts the heart and in deep humility supplicates his Lord, "Let only that little be left of me whereby I may name thee my all". Then, when the ice has once been broken, prayer follows prayer in the next seven poems (Nos. 34-40). The narrowing influence of the little self has been removed,

and he can now approach his God for His blessings. His vision widens and his first thoughts are turned towards his country. The prayer for his country is universal in nature. It has found an echo in every heart for its thought and expression. Though it is well known, it can bear repetition.—

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action—

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

But the next prayer, though not so well known, is more efficacious for weak humanity, whose infirmities beset him at every step in life. The poet thus sings the psalm—

This is my prayer to thee, my lord—strike,

strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind above daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love (No. 36).

Yes, complete resignation to the will of God is the only way of escape. He is the path and He is the light. The poet has found that all desires distract him day and night, and are false and empty to the core. His only desire, therefore, is, "That I want thee, only thee—let my heart repeat without end". The poet asks his God to come in the form which he needs most. When his heart is hard and parched, he prays that God's mercy should descend upon him like gentle rain from heaven. Again there is a cry against desire, for this is the hardest obstacle, "When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust. O thou holy one, thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder" (No. 39).

His prayer breaks out with greater fervency

when his heart has dried up and ceased to flow in devotion towards God. He calls upon Him to appear in any form, even as an "angry storm, dark with death, if it is thy wish, and with lashes of lightning startle the sky from end to end". But his only request is, "Call back, my Lord, call back this pervading silent heat, still and keen and cruel, burning the heart with dire despair" (No. 40).

This is the last prayer with which this section may be taken to close.

V

His prayers have not gone in vain. God has granted them, for in his heart he listens to His words of promise to come. He, therefore, waits for Him with the anxious, beating heart of a simple girl waiting for her lover to see the splendid division of his regal appearance. He says, "I sit on the grass and gaze upon the sky and dream of the sudden splendour of thy coming—all the lights ablaze, golden pennons flying over thy car, and they at the roadside standing agape, when they see

thee come down from thy seat to raise me from the dust, and set at thy side this ragged beggar girl a tremble with shame and pride, like a creeper in a summer breeze." But God does not come; He is held back by the jostling crowd of the world, and the poor votary has to wait and weep and wear out his heart in vain longing. For the time is not yet ripe. There are some works still to do; and until he is free from these, he will not find God, though he is assured that he will have the good fortune of enjoying His divine company, of sailing with Him in the same boat, 'and never a soul in the world would know of this our pilgrimage to no country and to no end" (No. 42).

Though the poet waits for God in expectation, his vigil is not constant. At a time when he was busy with the play things of the world, God comes, unknown to him, and claims him for His own. He finds now that God does not disclaim the dust of the earth. He also realises that God is immanent in all things, for the steps he hears in his play-room 'are the same that are echoing from star to star'.

So he waits and watches, in which there is pleasure; and his heart is filled with joy as he sees signs of His approach in earth and sky, in light and shadow. "From dawn till dusk I sit here before

my door, and I know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I shall see" (No. 44). And now the thought is confirmed in him that God is always coming nearer and nearer to men; it is they who keep away from Him. He asks them to listen to the footsteps of God, as "He comes, comes, ever comes. Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes". April fragrance and July clouds proclaim Him; joy and sorrow reveal Him. Grown conscious of His slow approach, one day he feels the divine presence within him. "It is as if the time were come to wind up my work, and I feel in the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence". Also it so happened one night that waiting and watching for Him, he goes to sleep wearied out. But he does not want that others should wake him up even when his Lord appears at his door. His is a precious sleep, which only waits for His touch to vanish. And with deeper significance he adds, "Let him appear before my sight as the first of all lights and all forms. The first thrill of joy to my awakened soul let it come from his glance. And let my return to myself be immediate return to him" (No. 47).

Men seek Him far and wide, and when anybody like the poet, refrains from the fruitless search,

they laugh at him in scorn. While they trudge along with weary limbs and aching feet, he stretches out his tired limbs on the grass and goes to sleep, resigning himself to the will of God. "At last, when I awoke from my slumber and opened my eyes, I saw thee standing by me, flooding my sleep with thy smile. How I feared that the path was long and wearisome, and the struggle to reach thee was hard!"

VI

After all God has come. The melody of the musician's plaintive note has caught His ear, and with a flower for his prize, He has come and stopped before his cottage door. But when God comes, men are reluctant to surrender themselves and their all to Him, to accept Him as the be-all and end-all of their lives. They fear lest, in gaining Him, they should have to lose all; for they know not that His touch turns the thing they least value into a priceless object. When the poet realises this

truth, it is too late, the last grain of the sand has flown. "I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart to give thee my all" (No. 50).

Though God's approach is indicated to us by many unfailing signs, we disregard them in our headlessness; so that when He actually knocks at the door in the depth of the night, we are caught unprepared. We have to receive Him, but we greet Him with empty hands, and lead Him into our rooms all bare! But God comes in all His glory like a lover, and the poet like a beloved longed to have the wreath on his neck, at least to have a stray petal or two left behind at the time of His departure. But when the lover is gone, the beloved finds that what he has left behind is his mighty sword, 'flashing as a flame, heavy as a bolt of thunder'. When the first shock of surprise is over, he realises the value of the strange gift. He sees that it is meant to arm with strength so that he may fearlessly brave the dangers of the world. He says, "Thou has left death for my companion and I shall crown him with my life. Thy sword is with me to cut asunder my bonds, and there shall be no fear left for me in the world". The terrible sword is, therefore, more beautiful to him than the dainty wristlet on the lover's hand, as it infuses spiritual

power into his soul (Nos. 52; 53).

So God has come and blessed him with the highest spiritual gift. His is the condition of blessedness. When He appears again as a thirsty traveller, he is not taken unawares. He gives Him water to allay His thirst, and the memory of the service clings to his heart and enfolds it in sweetness (No. 54).

Now with joy in the depth of his heart, he sees everything bathed in divine delight. He reads a new meaning into his life. God fulfils His purpose in him and through him. In his life God's will is even taking shape, for without Him, God's love has no value; without the finite, the Infinite has no sense. God has, therefore, decked Himself in beauty to captivate his heart, and is seen in the perfect union of the two—Eternal God in unity with Eternal Man (No. 56). When the union is complete, when love and devotion have made the devotee and his God one, his songs of praise break out into ecstatic expression of this highest realisation of life. Now he sees God as the light which illumines his life and diffused through all things around him; and the devine strains in which joy may be expressed mingle in his heavenly symphony. He also finds that the immortal forms in

which joy expresses itself are the manifestations of the love of God. He says, "yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved of my heart—this golden light that dances upon the leaves, these idle clouds sailing across the sky, this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon the forehead" (No. 59).

Strength made perfect with the joy that God's love brings, the poet is not loth to take his share in the affairs of the world. But his activities are neither sullied by selfish motives, nor compelled by the fear of the unknown. "Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets" (No. 60). He speaks of the baby's smile and the freshness of his limbs as if they form a part of himself, for as the baby gets its beauty from the mother, so God's touch has given him the simplicity and innocence of little children. Now in his own child-like manner, he sees how close he has come to Nature. The joy in a child's heart sets all Nature pulsating with the throbs of pleasure.

VII

With this conception of divine love and joy, and with this consciousness of divine presence, the mystical yearning for a closer communion with the divine deepens. The poet sees that this world with its variety of phenomena and appearances is the manifestation of but the One. The only prayer of the psalmist is, therefore, that he may never lose the bliss of the touch of the One in the play of the many (No. 63). When a man is thus completely devoted to God, ever feeling His presence in all

things of matter and mind, he becomes an instrument in the hands of God, through whom God fulfils himself, but for whom God's own joy of creation would have remained unfulfilled. God sees His creation through his eyes, gives Himself to him in love and then feels His own entire sweetness in him. Even the poetic genius born in him does not respond to any touch but that of God's, and bursts into song only in praise of Him. So it is the last gift offered to God clothed in words of a final song (No. 66).

Now, this spiritual responsiveness awakens him to a world beyond this one of physico-chemical phenomena, where day dawns and night falls. It is the supersensuous world where the soul takes her flight in the stainless white radiance of God. In that world there is no day, nor night, nor form nor colour, and never, never a word. But the daylight is not without its usefulness. It puts him in communion with God. It conveys his tears and sighs and songs to His feet in the form of a thin cloud, which casts a fleeting shadow upon that awful white light. The consciousness grows deeply profound in him that Man and Nature, life and death, past and present are imbued with the same vital principle—with the same life energy

(No. 69). It appears everywhere in forms of joy, and measures of dance, may be the rhythmic dance of death and destruction. Man should join the gladness of this rhythm, even though to be tossed and lost and broken in the whirl of this joy. Seasons come and go dancing with the music and Nature is clothed in colour and perfume through the presence of this abounding joy which is and is not every moment.

But this variegated appearance of the world is due to the play of Maya, which influences the self of the poet. And his self is part of the Supreme Self, of that Absolute God, who is one in Himself and many in the creation of the Universe. For impelled by the desire of creation the One severed Himself into Many and took shape in the body of the poet. So this world is a "great pageant of thee and me. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me." But the Absolute remains the Absolute enveloped in all His mystery beyond this multi-coloured veil of magic forms—"This screen that thou hast raised is painted with innumerable figures with the brush of the night and the day. Behind it thy seat is woven in wondrous mysteries of curves, casting away all

barren lines of straightness" (No. 71).

He, therefore, says with absolute faith that it is God who dwells in him, and it is He who rules his being—moving his inmost heart with feelings of pain and pleasure, and investing the outer world with the charms of His maya. Why should any one renounce such a beautiful world? At least he does not want to renounce it like an ascetic who desires to be free from the worldly bondages. Freedom lies in the enjoyment of God's creation—taking delight in all things of sight and sound, touch and taste; for it is only through the objects of our senses that we can take in the beauty of God's creation. It is wrong to say that they are temptations of this world, leading man astray from God. On the other hand, through God's grace, "all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen to fruits of love" (No. 73).

If he can entirely give himself up to his God. He may come one day and call him away. In the evening, playing upon His lute, He may lure him away, as Shri Krishna, the eternal Man, calls away his Radha, the eternal Woman, in all ages. Whatever he may enjoy in this world, everything is the gift of God. The gifts not only fulfil the needs of the world, but the final fulfilment of the purpose

of their own life is to lose themselves in God. The ultimate end of human life is the attainment of God, not renouncing this world but discharging the duties which his station in life imposes upon him consecrating everything in the holy name of God. Whatever meaning men may find in his words, "yet their last meaning points to thee". The best course of life for him is to dedicate himself absolutely to his God, with all his devotion and humility, so that after death he may stand face to face with his God. "Day after day, O lord of my life, shall I stand before thee face to face. . . . In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil and with struggle, among hurrying crowds shall I stand before thee face to face.

And when my work shall be done in this world, O King of Kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face".

But after all God is God, a supreme almighty being, at best the heavenly father, from whom he must keep at a respectable distance. How can he go close to Him; how can he have the freedom of a friend with Him? And yet, "Thou art the Brother amongst my brothers, but I heed them not; I divide not my earnings with them, thus sharing my all with thee."

"In pleasure and in pain I stand not by the side of man, and thus stand by thee. I shrink to give up my life, and thus do not plunge into great waters of life".

But the purpose of man's life is to see God face to face. If his lot of life does not bring this blessing, at least he ought to feel the pangs of separation in his dreams and in his wakeful hours. He ought always to remember that the object of life has not yet been gained. He is only like a cloud and it is God's touch which will melt the vapour, 'making me one with thy light'; till then he is to suffer the sorrow of separation from God. But a day will come when the cloud will dissolve in the darkness of the night, or in the light of the morning. The poet knows that God in His inscrutable ways brings the fruit of life to men. When in moments of weakness he imagines that it is wasted or lost, God brings about the full fruition in the proper season. There is no count of time with God. He lives in Eternity and He can wait infinitely for the perfection of men's being. But man scrambles for time in which he does everything except taking his offering to the altar of God. In the evening of life when he fears that all opportunities are lost, he finds that yet there is time.

VIII

Ultimately, the poet has got his reward in the form of blessings from God. He now sings of them and seems to approach the realisation of life. The lyrics Nos. 83 to 93 "mark the probation that seemed to teach him the second deliverance of which the Upanishads speak". One by one he remembers what he had realised in life. He begins with an invocation to "Mother", the Eternal Woman in the heart of creation, or what is more commonly known among us, "Prakriti". All gifts come from

her—"wealth and fame come from thee and it is for thee to give or to withhold them". But when man gets suffering, it is the part of Purusha that he plays. Sorrow is, therefore, his own making; "and when I bring it to thee as my offering thou reward-
ets me with thy grace" (No. 83). He has now also realised that everything in the Universe, in Nature and Man, is due to the creative will of God, who separates Himself from His creation. And from this separation arise all joys and sorrows, the beauties of earth and sky, and even the songs of the poet's heart. Lastly, he knows that when men came into this world from their home in heaven, they were poor and helpless. They had no protective armour against the slings and arrows of life. But when they went back to their home, after a brief sojourn in this life, they had gained peace of mind. They went in spiritual blessedness, leaving the fruits of life behind them (No. 85).

IX

Now comes Death, the messenger of God. Though the poet's heart is filled with fear at his first approach, he is not unwilling to bow him his welcome and offer him the treasure of his heart. He will be left with nothing except his forlorn self as his last offering to God. But the self, set free from the bondage of the body, is not finite in its limitations. So seeking that self he has come to the door of the infinite mansion of God. He stands on the brink of eternity and his last prayer is—

“Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean, plunge it into the deepest fullness. Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch in the allness of the universe”.

When the first signal of death comes, he casts a lingering look behind and wistfully thinks if his life's work has been finished. The temple of life is now in ruins and the deity installed there remains in deathless neglect. Quite possible the worshipper of old wanders, ever longing for the favour still refused and wearily comes back to the ruined temple with hunger in his heart. But it is finally decided that he will sing no more. The speech of his heart will be carried on in murmurings of a song. Whilst others are busy, he has got his untimely leave in the middle of the day, in the thick of work. He has spent full many an hour in the strife of the good and the evil and he knows not why the sudden call has come to what useless inconsequence (No. 89).

But now that Death *has* come at the close of his life, he is prepared to welcome him as his guest and offer him all that he has. “Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life. . . . All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life, will I place before him at the close of my days when

death will knock at my door." For death is the last fulfilment of life; without it all the work of life will remain incomplete, unfinished. Death completes what life prepares, and every step forward in life is an approach towards Death. Now that Death has come, he is prepared to go with him, as the bride with the bridegroom. "The flowers have been woven and the garland is ready for the bridegroom. After the wedding the bride shall leave her home and meet her lord alone in the solitude of night". But Death comes bringing a complete change in man's life, while Nature continues its eternal course. He, therefore, sees things in a new light; there is a change in the sense of values. "Things that I longed for in vain and things that I got—let them pass. Let me but truly possess the things that I ever spurred and overlooked" (No. 92).

X

He now takes leave and bids farewell to all, only he asks them to wish him good luck on his journey. "I start on my journey with empty hands and expectant heart". A sannyasi may pass through any road without being molested; his red-brown dress being protection enough. But his has not been the life of a sannyasi; he will go to meet his lord in all the glory of a wedding, he has no fear in his heart. When the poet came to this world,—a naked new-born child, new to its earth

and sky, he was not aware of the moment. But with the growth of his faculties, he found that he was no stranger in this world, and that God, the inscrutable without name and form, had taken him under His wings. "Even so, in death the same unknown will appear as ever known to me. And because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well." And after death he will begin another life: death is merely an interim between life and life. The symbol is supreme in its suggestiveness—"The child cries out when from the right breast the mother takes it away, in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation" (No. 95).

He has enjoyed life to the full and his last words of farewell are born of the happiness which he found in this world. Living among men and women here, in the midst of the finite, he has had glimpses of the Infinite; he has thrilled with His touch who is beyond touch. So let death come now; he will depart with delight. For death is not extinction, but it is completeness. During the whole of his life, he was as if busy in play with God. "I knew nor shyness nor fear, my life was boisterous". Now, when death approaches, he realises that the whole universe is bound to the feet of God—a sudden sight which breaks upon him

like a revelation. Now the individuality of the poet is dissolved. He cannot have anything of his own. "I surely know my pride will go to the wall, my life will burst its bonds in exceeding pain, and my empty heart will sob out in music like a hollow reed, and the stone will melt in tears". But then comes the true realisation of death—"From the blue sky an eye shall gaze upon me and summon me in silence. Nothing will be left for me, nothing whatever, and utter death shall I receive at thy feet."

In the voyage of life, the poet has been at the helm; but now he gives himself up to his God. He cannot, will not struggle any more, and acknowledging defeat, resign himself utterly to the will of God. He will wait for Him quietly and receive Him whenever He comes. His life has been passed amidst men and women of this world, but in the midst of the finite, his soul has always sought for the Infinite. But now he will not go on any adventure. He has ceased to take delight in weathering the storms of life. He now longs to pass quietly into His presence with the harp of his life and tune it to the notes of Eternity till his music is finished; then 'lay down my silent harp at the feet of the silent' (No. 100).

L'ENVOI

His has been a life of songs. They have been the beginning and end of his life. They have enriched his life and they have revealed to him the secrets and significance of life. And now at the end of his journey they have brought him to the palace gate of his Master.

Thus he has come to know his God through his songs, which have of themselves come out from the depth of his heart. He cannot explain them—neither his God, nor his songs. But men laugh at

him thinking he is proud.

But now let everything come to an end in a last offering to his God—let body, mind and soul, everything find its last fulfilment in offering itself to Him. And his songs?—"Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of home-sick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests, let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee."

